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School for International Training College Semester Abroad

Ghana - Spring 1999

Word and Image: A Synthesis of Twi

Proverbs and Photographs

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Abstract

Word and Image: A Synthesis of Twi Proverbs and Photographs intended to give background on the final product of an independent study project, a photographic essay combined with Twi proverbs. This paper briefly describes the product. There is a discussion of proverbs and photographs as methods of communication. Some information about the functions of proverbs is included, as well as a list of proverbs, in both Twi and English, not used in the final product.

Acknowledgements

To the Gyamfi family. Thank you for introducing me to the people I interviewed, for being, and translators, and for answering all of my questions. Individually and as a family you helped me endlessly, and did more than necessary. Most importantly, thank you for welcoming me into your home. I am very lucky to have met you.

To Mr. Charles Phillip Oppong-Cofy, or Uncle, for all your help.

To Mr. Opanin Thomas K. Owusu and family for sharing so many proverbs with me. I really enjoyed learning at your house.

To Mr. J. Owusu-Ansah for your patience and proverbs.

To Mr. E. K. Gyamfi for giving me the basics.

To Mr. deGraft-Johnson for being a great advisor. You went out of your way to make it easier for me. I really enjoyed talking with you.

To Mr. Agyenim-Boateng for letting me into the darkroom and all your patience. I do not know how to say how much I appreciate it.

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Introduction

At the center of the use of proverbs is the understanding that indirect speech can be the best method of communication. This is, in a sense, the subject of this independent study project. The final product of my study is not this paper, but a photography essay in the format of a short book. The photographs were taken on various farms in the town of Jamasi, and interspersed with proverbs I learned while living there. The intention of this paper is to outline the path, give a little academic background, and to describe some of the things I learned about proverbs. I will also include the proverbs not used in the book.

I came to Ghana with the intention of doing a photo essay. I do not have such a level of expertise that I would label myself a photographer. I have taken a few classes in photography before, and am familiar with the basic techniques for black and white developing and printing. I chose to incorporate proverbs for only a few simple reasons. I was impressed with the wisdom of the few proverbs I had heard. I thought that in length and depth they would make good text for a photo essay. They are short enough that they can easily be arranged in different orders to develop different ideas. And I thought they were a good means for learning about Ghanaian culture. My reasons for choosing farming as a subject were equally simple. I think that farming is visually interesting. It is a flexible enough subject that it offers many choices in form and content. I wanted to live in a town and learn about the kinds of work people do to live. And finally, I think that people's relationship to the land is an important aspect of individual and cultural identity.

In traditional Ghanaian culture there are many ways in which proverbs are expressed visually. In The Akan Traditional Language Without Speech Eric Ofei describes many situations in which proverbial visual symbols are used. Of these Adinkra symbols are the most well known. These symbols, each representing a particular proverb, are used in Adinkra cloth, linguist's staffs, gold-weights, various kinds of a king's regalia, tools, cloth, and state emblems.¹ The Language of Adinkra Symbols by Alfred Kofi Quarcoo gives several examples of Adinkra symbols and their meanings.² There are, however, a seemingly endless number of books and charts which outline various Adinkra symbols, many of them with similar content. In *Poetic Traditions Amongst the Ashantis* Henrietta Emma Saah writes that some designs used in Kente cloth derive from proverbs.³

I was able to find virtually no examples of the contemporary use of proverbs either expressed visually or combined with a visual medium. D. K. A. Okwan presented Some Borbor" Fante Proverbs Illustrated as a thesis to the University of Science and Technology in Kumasi.⁴ He listed a number of proverbs, and for many of them included drawn illustrations that literally represented the action that the proverb described. The comic strip "Ananse," which runs in the *Weekly Spectator*, is the only example I have seen of the use of this traditional subject in such a non-traditional format. Ananse is the main character in a body of folktales. I believe these stories can be equated with proverbs in this context as they are strongly linked. Many proverbs derive from such stories, and are actually shortened versions of them. To research the contemporary use of proverbs combined with a visual medium, I looked through the library at the College of Art of the University of Science and Technology in Kumasi, and the library at the Institute of African

Studies, at the University of Ghana at Legon. I also asked a number of people. In all cases I was advised and found that there is virtually no information on proverbs used in this way. This in itself was informative.

However, there is a much larger body of research focusing on proverbs themselves. Several of these discuss proverbs as a method of communication, and the specific function of indirect communication. The Proverb in the Context of Akan Rhetoric: A Theory of Proverb Praxis. written by Kwesi Yankah, was the most useful book of this type. He states that, "Beside the manipulation of the proverb in discourse, its potential as a metaphor may be exploited for effect. In doing this the proverb user may rely on the intrinsic value of the proverb as well as proper and effective usage."⁵ The inherent nature of proverbs, the fact that they are so different in concept and method from straightforward speech, is one of the qualities that make proverbs such an effective means of communication. There are other cultural means of indirect speech which are, to varying degrees, somewhat related to proverbs. These include the tone riddle, anansesem, and pounding songs (songs sung to the rhythm of people pounding fufuo, an Ashanti staple dish).⁶ When Ashanti people learn how to use proverbs, the focus is not on creating them on the spot, though this too is done. Mostly, people learn how to use already existing, and sometimes ancient, proverbs. The fact that many proverbs are so old proves their effectiveness as a method of communication, particularly in terms of Ashanti life and culture. Yankah quotes Kenneth Burke as saying, "Proverbs are strategies for dealing with situations. Insofar as situations are typical and recurrent in a given social structure, people develop names for them and strategies for handling them."⁷ In saying this he

shows that proverbs' applicability to Ashanti life is one of their qualities that makes them so effective. In Akan-Ashanti Folktales R.S. Rattray says that folktales were used by slaves to caricature the behavior and misdemeanors of their masters. They were also used for political innuendo.⁸ These are good examples of the importance of oblique communication for certain situations faced by the Ashanti. He also gives examples of the communicative value of the proverbial images on linguist's staffs, which could be used to convey a person's status in a particular social setting or to express general social statements.⁹ In Some "Borbor" Fante Proverbs Illustrated Okwan mentions that proverbs are also spoken in the language of the drum.¹⁰ This is a good example of the flexibility of proverbs. Their spoken, visual, and musical aspects make them available in so many situations. This would not work for a less metaphorical means of expression.

In The Akan Traditional Language Without Speech, Eric Ofei stresses that a knowledge and understanding of proverbs helps one to understand the symbolism of linguist staffs, and I believe this could be applied to the many other forms of proverbial symbolism.¹¹ Some of the forms of symbolism he discusses are those found in Gold-weights, in a king's regalia or a procession, the decoration of canoes, symbols used in textiles, stools, and state emblems, as well as physical gestures.¹² All of these can be proverbial. These examples again highlight the functional value of proverbs.

Benjamin Afful, in a thesis entitled Ananse Stories - Social Cultural, and Artistic value emphasizes the ability of Ananse stories to inspire creativity. He gives two examples of drawings inspired by stories. He talks of "Anansekromian Soundz," a group of I dancers, actors, writers, and musicians who were based at the Art Council in Accra,

who put on a weekly performance based on these stories.¹³ Mawutor Ada Tay, in The Hawk and the Hen: An Adapted Folkloric Tale points out that visual creativity inspired by these stories, specifically illustrations, are important when communicating them to children. It is an important point, that the constant expression of tales and proverbs in a variety of ways one of the only ways of ensuring that they will continue to reach people.

Methodology

I first began working on this project between the 28th of February and the 5th of March, while living in a town called Essienimpong, in the Ashanti region of Ghana. I had two separate interviews to collect proverbs, one with a group of construction workers, and one with Okyeame Akwasi Oppong, a linguist who I was told is recognized throughout the Ashanti region for his knowledge of proverbs. In these two sessions I was able to collect 38 proverbs. This is when I first realized the trouble I was going to have in translation. Literal translations of many proverbs often do not make sense to non-Ghanaians, and need lengthy explanations. For this reason, a former assemblyman who was acting as my translator decided to translate the meaning for me rather than the proverb itself. I ran into this difficulty again when collecting proverbs in Jamasi. many people thought, and logically so, that the aspect of proverbs that is most important is their meaning. Yet without a literal translation, without understanding the metaphor being use the pattern of thinking behind the proverb is lost. The images used in proverbs are usually taken from the surrounding world. They educate about the nature of the Ashanti region, and some of the ways in which people think of it. Without a literal translation, proverbs also become less thought-provoking. The metaphorical images make listeners focus on proverbs and think about them. So do the fact that they are not regular speech. I will give an example from Essienimpong that best illustrates my point. Okyeame Akwasi Oppong said a proverb in Twi, and it was translated for me as, "Rome was not built in a day." I

asked for the literal translation. The man translating for me said that it was a good translation, I could understand it, and it expressed the proverb's meaning. He finally said that the proverb literally translated said, "It takes the moon more than one day to go around the earth." The unfamiliarity of this image to me makes it more pleasing than one I have heard so often from childhood.

Another aspect of the importance of a literal translation is that proverbs are very subtle and complex. Properly used a proverb can walk around a situation, looking at it from all angles and discussing every aspect. Each role different people play, the way these relate, the emotions that go along with a problem, understandings and misunderstandings, can all be expressed in one well used sentence. This is difficult to understand getting the proverbs out of context as I did. It is nearly impossible without knowing what was really said.

For the first three weeks of this project I lived in the town of Jamasi, in the Ashanti region, near Kumasi. I faced the problem of getting a literal translation there as well. Sometimes when it seemed that no one was giving me the right answer, the reality was that I was not asking the right question. Eventually I was able to communicate to almost everyone why it was important to me to get a literal translation. Yet I was not able to cord it for every proverb collected. This is one of the proverbs' greatest flaws.

After a day of research in Accra I went to Jamasi, where Kokroko Gyamfi introduced me to his family, with whom I stayed. Every member of the family took it as their responsibility to help me. They introduced me to all of the people whom I interviewed about proverbs. They arranged for me to go to the farm with them as well as

a variety of types of farms, to take photographs. They translated for me, and were also often my informants.

To take photographs I went to each of the Gyamfi's two farms twice. I visited the four farms of their neighbour, Mr. Kwame Boateng, and a large cocoa farm owned by a family friend, Mr. Charles Phillip Oppong-Cofy. I visited a snail farm. I interviewed Mr. Albert Sefa, an officer from the Department of Agriculture, who teaches interested residents of Jamasi about poultry farming. On each trip I was allowed to take pictures. I learned a lot about farming techniques from these trips. Mr. Gyamfi took me to a workshop of the Ghana Organic Agriculture Network. From this and various conversations I was able to learn a lot about the benefits and disadvantages of organic and non-organic farming, and their practice in Jamasi.

The people I talked with were all very eager to help me collect proverbs. Mr. Kwame Gyamfi (unrelated), a retired headmaster, taught me about the basics of proverbs, and made me go over a few slowly and methodically, pointing out the diversity in each that I could not recognize before. In many informal conversations various members of the Gyamfi family told me proverbs to write down and taught me about their functions. In total I recorded 107 proverbs in Jamasi. Most of these came from group interviews, three times at the house of Mr. A.J. Ownsu-Ansah, and twice at the house of Mr. Opanin Thomas K. Owusu. At each interview there were between four and eight people besides myself actively translating, discussing, and supplementing each others perspectives. Family members listened in while working or came to sit down and observe the discussions. Children were always present, listening and sometimes helping to translate.

This made the interviews more enjoyable, and I believe that it also helped me to collect better information. I was not able to go over most of the proverbs again in different settings with Twi and English experts, which is a definite limitation on the quality of the translations I have. It is also a limitation in terms of the proverb meanings, or information about the appropriate time(s) for their use. Each proverb can be used in several situations, sometimes with completely different meanings. For many I only collected one interpretation, and one situation in which it would be used. The group interviews were thus very helpful in making sure that each idea was approved of by a number of people before I wrote it down. Although I had a tape recorder, the people I interviewed implied that they were not comfortable with being taped, and so everything was recorded in my notebook. This did not however present any type of problem.

With regards to both photography and recording proverbs, one of the biggest limitations was a lack of diversity in the people I worked with. Although the interviews for proverbs were discussed in a group, the source of the proverbs was almost always the head of the family. Mr. Ownsu-Ansah told me all of his proverbs from memory. Mr. Owusu told me some from memory and some were taken from books so old that the titles were barely legible. Although women sometimes suggested translations or ways of explaining the proverbs to me, my informants were all men. The subjects of my photographs are almost all men as well. The work has an inherent gender bias. The lack of diversity in numbers of different household I went to is also a limitation. My informants' personalities affected what proverbs they chose to share with me, and how they interpreted and understood them. In every way greater diversity would have helped.

Not being able to speak Twi was the biggest limitation on my study. All of the subtleties and context of proverbs were lost on me because of this. Ideally no study of Twi proverbs should be undertaken without a knowledge of Twi.

The most challenging part of this project was dealing with the photography. The first three weeks I went into Kumasi five times to meet with my advisor, get film developed, and try to print. Most of my negatives were damaged, and it was not until the third week and several attempts that I was able to start producing good prints. There was, and at the moment still is, a nationwide strike at all Universities. This could have kept me from doing any research, or printing photographs at all. With the help of my advisor I was able to get into the library which was supposed to be locked. With his help and the help of Mr. Agyenim-Boateng, the teaching assistant in charge of the darkroom, I was able to use darkroom at night for as many hours as I liked. During the last two weeks of my project, the photography aspect as well went smoothly, and I was able to produce 21 prints. The last week of my study I lived in Kumasi, in order to have full access to the darkroom and other facilities at the University of Science and Technology.

Chapter 1

Proverbs and Photography as Methods of Communication

Photography is a unique method of communication. It records a moment of time and space and light that in theory any person at a particular place, at the right angle and time of day, could have seen. But through framing and simple manipulations a photographer shows the world to others as they see it. In a way, one person can literally see the world through the eyes of another. The challenge to the viewer is to see what is in front of and behind the photographer's eyes, to move into a different point of view. One aspect of this is that the viewer is asked to stop thinking in words. In a sense proverbs do the same thing. Because they are a metaphorical way of thinking, proverbs and photographs draw one's attention.¹⁴ They challenge the listener to think symbolically and metaphorically. This is part of what makes them successful. To step out of one line of thinking a person steps out from behind a set of barriers. They are more able to hear.

Proverbs and photographs are like any medium in the sense that they can express things that other mediums cannot. To translate an image or a proverb into plain language is useful in some instances, but is normally counter-productive. It involves taking a concept and trying to shove it through a medium which does not fit it. It misses the point of using that particular form of communication in the first place. To give an example, Kwesi Yankah says, "Where a proverb user has been purposefully oblique, with the intent to conceal or ambiguate meaning, to ask for clarification on the basis of ignorance is to miss the very rationale for proverbial obliqueness. The explication of delicate meaning,

indeed, undermines the artistic process."¹⁵ Every medium has certain concepts it is better able to express than other mediums.

This suggests another similarity between proverbs and photographs. Somewhat paradoxically, both are forms of communication that are sometimes used with the intention to hide meaning. I was told that if a group of people are talking, and one sees a person coming who they do not want to overhear, proverbs can be used to tell the rest of the group to change the subject.¹⁶ Proverbs are also sometimes used to talk over the heads of certain people present.

Some of the characteristics proverbs and photographs have in common are those that help make them so persuasive. There are verbal and physical cues in normal conversation that warn a listener to raise their defenses. Photographs do not do this because they are perceived as non-threatening. After all, they are inanimate. Both proverbs and photographs are indirect and impersonal in form, and this too is non-threatening and adds to their effectiveness. Another aspect of their persuasiveness is that both are given high cultural value. Among the Ashanti the ability to talk well, meaningfully, beautifully, and tactfully, is highly valued. The use of proverbs is a sign of refinement. Several people who speak Twi as their primary language have told me that they cannot speak Twi well, for they are unable to use proverbs. Culturally, they are given respect. Yankah states that part of their persuasiveness is due to their literary value and their appeal to cultural truth.¹⁷ In a sense these things are also true for photography. Quality black and white photography is considered a "high art," and this label and the respect it brings makes photographs well received. Photojournalism is not given this

status, but it is considered authoritative. This authoritativeness is one of the most important links between photography and proverbs. Though subjective in use, both are sometimes thought of as being expressions of reality.

Chapter 2

Proverbs and Their Use

It is first necessary to say that the proverbs I am going to list and discuss are not necessarily representative of Ghanaian proverbs generally. All of those I learned in this study are Twi proverbs. To the best of my knowledge they are all Ashanti. They do not represent proverbs learned in context either. More than I would have liked, I and those trying to help me referred to books. One informant told me that he explained proverbs out of books to me because it was difficult to think of so many off the top of his head. And after all, proverbs that are written down were first said. I wanted to collect all the proverbs orally, to reduce the chance of directly copying what had been done before, but studying proverbs out of context made this difficult. Yankah's book is the only one I have read of the study of proverbs in context, and every other method is a dissection. A fish no longer lives when it is not in water.

It is because of the importance of context that proverbs are not lightly used. A proverb well spoken is far more expressive than "raw" language, and a proverb badly spoken invites immediate and severe ridicule.

A single proverb can have many meanings, depending on the situation in which it is used and the values of the speaker, for it is on these values that connotation rests. Just as in meanings, proverbs are also dynamic in creation. Most are set, yet a skilled speaker can create a proverb at any time to fit a particular situation.

Proverbs serve several functions. Kwame Gyamfi told me a number of them. They teach morals, and they teach about the physical world (the behavior of animals and

qualities of plants for example). They help a person to think deeply. Proverbs express a lot of meaning in few words. Proverbs are used to advise someone to look at a situation from a different perspective. They are sometimes used to teach history. They also beautify speech. Sometimes they are used to make a point or draw a conclusion in discussion. Although they are indirect, sometimes they are used as the best way of going straight to the point.¹⁸ As said earlier, proverbs can be used to talk over the heads of those who do not understand them. For example, when someone is leaving the presence of a chief, the chief may say to someone, "Ko gya no kwan." This translates as, "Show him off." The actual meaning of this is that the person is to be executed. D.K. Okwan stated that the goal of proverbs is to make people conform to societal norms.¹⁹ This is to some degree related to teaching morals or to another function of theirs, to give advice. Proverbs can be used to give a warning. I was told several which were meant to be used when advice has been given but not taken.

Mr. deGraft-Johnson, my advisor, and I were talking one day when he mentioned to me that sometimes people gather to exchange proverbs, just for enjoyment. "Proverbs can be like palm wine, meant to be share." He began to talk of proverb use among farmers, something I wish I had explored further. He told me, "Proverbs are used to deal with situations. Farmers face a lot of problems in this society. Sometimes they have to use them like a spear. Sometimes, they use them as a shield."²⁰

Proverbs are a particularly active form of speech. They require much participation on the part of the speaker and the listener. Even without their straightforward recitation, proverbs can be expressed through action. Certain types of gestures, often ones made at

funerals, are said to evoke proverbs.²¹ Dance moves can also be proverbial. Proverbs are also incorporated into a chief's procession, or into the drum language.

Human interaction can be proverbial in many ways. Yankah gives the example of a chief who thought that a court decision had been badly made. The next day he arrived at the court wearing his cloth inside out and his sandals on the wrong feet. This action was considered to be not only symbolic, but proverbial, meaning that he wanted to turn the court upside down. It was never stated whether this relates to a specific proverb or not.²²

Mr. Gyamfi told me a story of a king who sent a messenger to talk with some of his subjects. The messenger was sent back to the king with his ear cut off. It was the subjects' way of saying that the king needed to come and speak with them himself rather than sending a messenger.²³

I asked Kokroko what he thought about the relationship between proverbs and symbolism. He answered me with a story. A small bird took a loan from the lion, saying that he would pay it back when he grew big like the eagle and was able to work. The lion agreed. After some time he went to see the bird to collect his money, but saw that he was still the same size. He had not grown up yet. So the lion went away. He talked to the antelope about this situation, who suggested that he call the bird to come see him with his parents, grandparents, and other family members. The little bird did as he was asked, and the lion saw that they were all the same size. He said, "Oh! You have cheated me!" The little bird paid back the loan and asked lion where he had gotten the idea. The lion answered that it came from the antelope. The little bird gave the lion a kola nut, asking him to give it to the antelope on his behalf the next time he saw him. This the lion did, and

he learned that the antelope was unable to take a bite of the kola. In doing this there were two different messages the bird sent. One was that the antelope too had a weakness. The other was that, for all of his talking in the forest, the antelope was unable to do anything.

As proverbs are expressed through action, they are also expressed through visual symbols, some of which are representative of action. The adinkra symbols, linguist staffs, kente designs, and more have already been discussed. Just as proverbs are often shortened forms of stories, symbols are often shortened forms of proverbs. An example of this is the fairly common zig zag design in kente cloth. It represents the proverb, "Ow_koforo adobe," which means that the snake coils itself to be able to climb the tall palm tree. This proverb suggests that a person needs humility to become successful in life.

Ashanti culture is intensely symbolic, and much of this symbolism seems to be proverbial. However, the definition of the meeting point of symbolism and proverbialism is elusive and hard to define. Though all of the things listed above have been defined to me as proverbial, it is unclear whether they are derived from specific proverbs or if it is simply that their nature is proverbial. Many of the designs on linguist staffs clearly are derived from proverbs, and their use too is proverbial. Many linguists have more than one staff, each with a different design, and each meant to be used on different occasions. For example, the symbol of a buffalo represents the power to defend and protect, while the symbol of a rabbit represents a proverb about the appreciation of reciprocal aid. If there existed some kind of conflict between two towns, and a linguist from one went to talk with people from the other town, he could logically carry the first staff with him. If the two towns were on friendly terms, the second staff would make sense. But if the staff

with the symbol of a buffalo was brought to a friendly meeting, or vice versa, they would be inappropriate and out of context. Just like proverbs, they need to be used correctly, or the person using them looks foolish. From what I have seen and heard of the Ashanti region, proverbs are most often used by the elderly. They are used in the chief's palace, in court situations, in daily life. Yet people of all ages were able to help me learn about proverbs. few children copied the section on proverbs out of their schoolbooks for me, or told me one or two functions of proverbs. When we gathered for people to tell me proverbs everyone was able to contribute some knowledge or suggestions. It has been my observation that Ashanti symbolism as well seems to be understood, to one degree or another, by virtually everyone. The meeting of proverbs and symbolism is extremely significant. They are both not only a means of communication, but a way of seeing and understanding the world. I regret that I was not able to focus more on this connection. It is important for further study, it is a means for reaching a different kind of understanding of Ashanti culture.

Examples of Proverbs

Following is a list of all of the proverbs I collected in Jamasi. The only ones not included are those included in the photo essay. If a proverb was repeated, it is only included once. The names of all people who helped with the translations, explanations, and discussion are listed in the References section, for they are many. The underlined letters "o" stand for the Twi letter) and the underlined letters "e" represent the Twi letter £

The following proverbs were told to me by Emmanuel Kwame Gyamfi in Jamasi on 16th April 1999.

1. Dee onni ntoma goro asafo.

A person with no cloth always takes part in the asafo dance. Meaning: The asafo is a dance done to a particular kind of music, which can only be performed naked. This could mean that a poor person has to do the things that other poor people do, they cannot behave like a rich person. This could also mean that people go happily to do that which they are able to do. I was given the example that someone with few skills will go happily to a job that requires no experience. It could also mean generally that people who have similar personalities or situations spend time together.

2. Obaa to tuo a etwere Obarima dan mu.

If a woman buys a gun it is kept in a man's room. Meaning: Some things are meant for men to use, and some for women. Women should concentrate on women's work.

3. Nsuo a eye de na eko wahina mu.

The water that is sweet enters the inside of the pot. Meaning: This means that we search out that which will benefit us.

4. Nsako na nsa aba.

Hand goes, hand comes.

Meaning: If you help your neighbor in his work, he will help you in yours.

5 Abofra bo nwaw na ommo akyekyede.

A child breaks the shell of a snail, not that of a tortoise. Meaning: A child should do the work that can be done by a child, not the work of an adult. The snail's shell is thin and easy to break, while that of the tortoise is very strong.

6, Nsuo a etware kwan mu nni patafoo.

A stream that crosses a path cannot be stopped.

Meaning: This is said when there is a problem that cannot be easily solved.

The following proverbs were told to me by Mr. A. J. Owusu Ansah during three separate interviews, on 19/4/99, 21/4/99, and 22/4/99.

1. Kusie nya fubuo a obedi nanso wadru nko nibon mu.

A rat when it gets fufuo will eat it, but there is no way for it to carry the mortar into the hole.

Meaning: This could be said when you suppose someone to be rich, but in reality they have no money.

2. Se woto pampim a na wo w'ato kuro.

If you are traveling and reach the outskirts of town, you know you are getting close

Meaning: I could say this if I was going to borrow a book from someone who was not there. Someone else was in the house and was able to give me that book. It is not the situation I was looking for, but it close, and it was helpful.

3. De' adee wono na wodie na nye de ekom de no.

The owner of the food is the one who will eat it, not the hungry man.

Meaning: Just because you need something someone else has does not mean you will get it. This can have positive or negative connotations.

4. Ye de sika na epe sika.

Money is used to earn money.

Meaning: It is hard to earn money if you have nothing to start with. This can be said if someone is having this problem or if someone is wasting money.

5. Woparn ohutoo a wotono barima.

When you run after a coward you may meet a man.

Meaning: If someone is harassing you and you are fed up you can say this.

6. Enne ye medea okyina nso ye wo dee.

Today is mine, tomorrow is yours.

Meaning: The situation I am in today may be the situation you are in tomorrow or vice versa. You can say this when someone is boasting or showing off.

7. Bofre a eye de na dua da asee.

The pawpaw tree with the stick under it has the sweet fruit.

Meaning: This is a very flexible proverb. It is generally used to mean that you can tell when someone or something is good, there are signs.

8. Dee ye so ne batir hunu bedwam mu no yena.

You may be in a crowd with something going on in the center of a large circle. If you are short you need to pull yourself up on someone's shoulder to see inside.

Meaning: You can say this to someone who helps you or teaches you something. This could also mean that no one is who they are without the help of their father.

9. Obaa te se kuntu wofra a na ahuhuro de wo, woyi gu ho nso a na awo de wo.

A woman is like a hot blanket. When you put it on you are hot, and start to sweat but when you take it off you will become very cold.

Meaning: This is said when someone is troubling you, but you cannot be happy without them.

10. Nsamanpoom twene wose, ewo doa wode be ba.

When someone drums in a cemetery, only the dead hear it.

When someone is talking badly about you in your absence you may hear it in rumors, but you will not believe it until the person says it to you personally.

11. Du,a bata _boa a, ne twa ye twana.

It is difficult to cut a tree which is near a stone.

Meaning: When trying to cut the tree you will hit the stone with your cutlass and dull the blade. When a close friend hurts you, you will not or should not take them to court or deal with them harshly. You will not be able to because of your feelings for them. This can have positive or negative connotations. It can mean that it is bad when friendship keeps justice from happening.

12. Ahwenepa nkasa.

Good waist beads do not make noise.

Meaning: Similar to, "An empty barrel always makes the most noise." You say this when someone is behaving badly.

13. Ohohoo te se abofra.

A stranger is like a child.

Meaning: This can be said by either a native of a place or a stranger. It talks about the ignorance of the stranger.

14. Obi pem wo, na woa pem no bia yenka se woye barima.

If someone pushes you, and you do not push back, he will say that you are not a man.

Meaning: This can be said in a verbal or physical fight.

15. Yoon ye gye no komfoo ano.

When a priest or priestess is dancing, whatever they say is true.

Meaning: This describes the state when a priest or priestess is possessed by a spirit.

You say this to emphasize when you are speaking the truth in conversation.

16. Bu be ne tebe tea ntokwa mmpa.

When one who speaks proverbs and one who understands proverbs meet, they always fight.

Meaning: This refers to the use of proverbs to hide meaning from certain people.

Any way the thing is said, it will be understood.

17. Kerema ne esee ko.

Tongue and teeth fight.

Meaning: This is to be said when members of a family are fighting.

18. Yi dee eda woani soo ansa na woayi wo yonko dee.

Remove what is on your eye before you help someone remove what is on their eye.

Meaning: You cannot help others if you cannot help yourself first.

19. Se ye kyire nsuo bi a yen nni mu adee.

If you hate a river, you do not go there to fish.

Meaning: If you do not like someone, it is not right for you to ask them for help.

20. Obi a wo pere adee ho no da biara wo hwe ase, wo bereaa ne nsa anka nea
worehwehwe no.

A person who struggles constantly to acquire things will always fail before they get what they want.

Meaning: This warns the need for caution. The covetous person can never acquire enough, they will never be satisfied. Another way to say this is that the hasty climber will always fall. He or she is so bent on where they are going, that they do not stop to look at it.

21. Kraman se me da fam wo so dasro agudee.

The dog says you are up and I am down, it is in play.

Meaning: Say when people mistake people joking around for a serious situation or a fight.

22. Ton ton te ton ton te. Yennom nsa na yen fa adwenne.

When you meet a group of people drinking, do not assume that they are fools.

Meaning: Things are not what they appear. A group of people sitting over drinks may be discussing something more serious than you realize.

23. Dee faa Tano no, eho ara na ye gye na Amoa.

If you want to throw Amoa away, you must go throw it where you collected Tano.

Meaning: Tano is an important shrine, derived from the river Tano. Amoa is a small shrine that is a part of Tano. It means that the place where a person and/or their ancestors are from will always be the home of that person and their descendants.

24. Obia ono nkoa didie, ono nkoa na wuo.

He who eats alone dies alone.

Meaning: Selfishness isolates one. If someone will not share what they have, if they are hardhearted in the way they live and act, no one will mourn them at their death.

25. Kro koto ye na enye kro kosen.

When you go somewhere do not act superior to the people who live there.

Meaning The meaning can be literal, that one must show respect to others.

26. Enye den se wo be sua merika tuo afri mmoa ho.

It is not difficult to learn from the beasts the physical on the field.

Meaning: If you go somewhere you should act as the people there do, and do what they do, and you will learn.

27. Obi apedee ne dompo nsuro.

That which someone cherishes, his bones are not afraid of.

Meaning: That which someone likes deeply, they can handle.

28. Wo sene wo yonko a otanne wo.

When you are better off than your friend, he/she hates you.

Meaning: This may be said in some situations when there is a quarrel between two people, with a root in jealousy.

29. Se wo tan opani bia na wo bisa no nakasee.

It is when you really do not like an elderly person that you ask them in public to repay the debt they owe you.

Meaning: It is an Akan value to be gracious to those who are indebted to you. You would have to really not like someone to disgrace or embarrass them in public or in front of their friends in this way. You can say this if the person who is indebted to you does something bad to you.

30. Osum bodee dua, a sum kwadu bi.

When you want to put a stake by your plantain to help it grow, you must do the same to the banana.

Meaning: Bananas are considered less valuable than plantains. This could be said, for example, when someone is responsible for their son and their nephew, and provide for their son's education, but not for that of the nephew. The situation may come when the nephew is more important to that person than they can foresee. There is a similar proverb that is said to derive from a drought, when people had to depend more on bananas for a staple food than they had before.

31. Otan nne aduro.

Hatred has no end.

Meaning: When someone hates you, nothing you can do can please them or change their mind.

32. Obi do wo a do no bi.

When someone loves you, you should love them too.

Meaning: This can be said to someone who does something nice for you, to show appreciation.

33. Wope se wode boo bo anomaa a ope babi a wobe tu afa.

When you throw a stone at a bird, the bird flies away.

Meaning: This can be said when one is challenged, and is not strong enough to fight back.

It was also explained to me with the phrase: When poverty strikes at the door, laugh goes out the window.

34. Ewiase ye agoprama a obiara nansoo bo ne bra.

The world is a battlefield in which each person contests for his/her living.

Meaning: This is a flexible proverb. It can mean that a person needs to work hard to get what they want. It can also mean that the world is large enough for each person to do what they want or need to do. It can be said when someone is traveling.

35. Wo fefe funuani wo hunu saman.

If you plug the eye of a dead person, then you will find or see a ghost.

Meaning: This can mean that one needs to see a dead person to really know that they are dead. More generally, it can also mean that to know the truth of something, one needs to investigate it.

36. Okusie ne bon doosoo no onwu kwa.

A rat with many holes does not die easily.

Meaning: This is a warning to act cautiously.

37. Anomaa nnua ne nea wone no da dua koro.

Birds who sleep in the same tree are brothers and sisters.

Meaning: This is similar to: Birds of a feather flock together. It means that people should be around their family. It can be said when meeting anyone with whom you have something in common.

38. Natwie oko nsuo ho kane na onom nsuo pa.

The cow that reaches the stream first drinks the clean water.

Meaning: If a person has two children, and only one of them listens to the advice of their parents, that child will be given what they request.

39. Akoko a oben oni na odi abebe sere.

A chick that stays close to the hen gets the thigh of the grasshopper.

Meaning: This is similar to the last proverb. The thigh of the grasshopper is the best part.

40. Obra twa owuo.

Life has an end in death.

Meaning: This could be said at a funeral.

41. Nyansa mfitasee ene Nyame suro.

The fear of God is the beginning of wisdom.

Meaning One who fears God better understands the world.

42. Oba nyasani ye bu no be na yennka na asem.

To a wise person you speak in proverbs, not directly about a matter or a case.

Meaning: This can be said when you want to speak proverbially to hide what you are saying.

43. Korokotue yennka se korokosen.

When you go somewhere, do not act as a citizen of that place.

Meaning: This can be said if someone is overstepping their bounds.

44. Wo soro Nyame na wonyini kyere.

A person who fears God lives longer.

Meaning: This can be said when someone is behaving badly.

| 45. Yenfa abodwese hunu nko sraha.

We do not go to a town with a beard but nothing of value.

Meaning: Beards are sometimes a sign of a rich person. This is said when someone is acting like something they are not.

46. Wo hunu se wo yonko abodwese hyee na woasa nsuo asi wo dee ho.

When you see someone's beard on filte, you need to bring water to it.

Meaning: You must try to stop a fight.

47. Borof de na ensee ko so ayie.

The sweet pawpaw tree has so many birds around it that it looks like a funeral.

Meaning: A funeral with a lot of people means that a good person has died.

This next proverb was overheard by Mr. P.A. Gyamfi.

Ye pe a yebe hu unti na ye kyekyere boa.

In order that we do not forget something we put it in a boa.

Meaning: Boa is, for example, kola nuts wrapped up in leaves. It can mean anything tied up in a bundle. This is said to stress an issue or lay emphasis on a point in conversation. This can be said when people come to a deadlock in conversation. It can mean that an idea should be remembered for a point of reference in later conversation, that next time the people see each other they will continue from where they have stopped. After this has been said no one can bring in a new proposal or argument to 'unwrap' what has been said.

When talking to Ama Gyamfi, I mentioned that I may not be able to use all of the proverbs I have been told. She said to me, "Enam dodoo nnsee enkwan." This means that too much fish or meat does not spoil the soup.

The following proverbs were told to me by Opanin Thomas K. Owusu in two separate interviews, on 20/4/99 and 22/4/99. Mr. Charles Phillip Oppong-Cofy did much of the translating, as Mr. Owusu does not speak English. Many of these were taken from two very old books belonging to Mr. Owusu, written only in Twi. These were discussed and explained. The books are listed in the References sections.

1. Aketekyiwa ho nye fe nso one mpaninfoo na egoro.

A pot is not very beautiful, yet it plays with elderly people.

Meaning: This refers to a pot of palm wine, which is always dirty. This proverb means that one who looks ugly or unintelligent may be incredibly smart and advise important people. Things are not always as they appear.

2. Wosua asempa a, wonya enuonyam.

You will become wise by learning good things.

Meaning: This is used when an elderly person gives advise to someone younger.

3. Akoko nom nsu a, ode kyere Onyame.

When the cock drinks water it shows it to God.

Meaning: A cock needs to raise its head to swallow water, showing it to God. What this actually means is that when someone does something wrong, no matter in what way and if people find him to be good, God sees it.

4. Onyankopon nkum wo na odesani kum wo a, wonwu da.

If God has not killed you and an ordinary person kills you, you will not die.

Meaning: If it is not time for you to die, you will not.

5. Onipa mfon kwa; okom nne no a, na ode ka.

Man does not become thin or small if he is not owing.

Meaning: When a person is growing thin or appears as though they have a problem, there is always a reason.

6. Obi nsoma abotra nhwe n'ani akyi.

We do not send a child and look at his or her face.

Meaning: Children are often sent to give messages or run errands. When an adult asks a child to do something like this the child often has unhappy expression on their face.

7. Wope aka asem akyere Onyankopon a, ka kyere mframa.

When you want to speak to God, you speak to the air.

Meaning: Someone may say this before they pray.

8. Anoberebere ma abaa to.

Soft speaking will set you free.

Meaning: This can be said to ask for mercy when someone wants to hurt you.

Obi nkyere abofra Onyame.

Somebody does not show the child God.

Meaning: This proverb describes the inherent nature of religious sentiment. It can also be used to mean that one person does not need to tell another that what they are doing is bad. Everyone had an inherent idea of good and bad, so if someone is doing something wrong, they probably know it.

10. Me a meda ayaya minhu Nyankopon, na wo a wobutuw ho.

When I sleep on my back facing upwards, I cannot see God. How can you, who sleeps on your stomach facing the floor?

Meaning: This could be said when a rich person goes to ask something of a poor person

11. Onipa mee daa a, anka ote se sono.

If you were satisfied every time you would be like the elephant.

Meaning: This can be said when someone asks you for food, or when one complains about lack of food. It means that if you always ate all you wanted, you would become obese.

12. Obi nnim a, obi kyere.

If one does not know, another person teaches them.

Meaning: This could be said when someone has taught you something.

13. Onipa soa ade a obetumi.

Someone should carry the load that they are able to carry.

Meaning: Someone should not say something that they have no way of knowing.

14. Owo nka nipa kwa.

A snake does not bite for no reason.

Meaning: This can be said when one person is bothering another, as a warning.

15. Nnipa meenu mpatuw nye bone.

Two people do not make a bad thing.

Meaning: Two opinions make a better outcome.

Onipa wua, ne tekrema mporoo.

After a man's death his tongue does not rot.

Meaning: This can be said when someone is talking about the past. It can be said when someone dies, meaning that their words will always be remembered. This can be said to someone to express to them that you will always remember what they have taught you.

Abofra nsam ade nye hye na.

To give something as a gift to a child is not difficult.

Meaning: Something an adult may consider small or worthless can please a child.

Abofra kawa na enko opanyin nsa, na naduan de eko opanyin anom.

The ring of a child does not fit an elderly person, but his food can be eaten by an elderly person.

Meaning: An adult should only take from a child that which is appropriate.

Ayonkogoro te se mpaboa, se wohye na ankQ wo a woworo gu ho.

Making friends is like wearing sandals. If they do not fit then you remove them.

Meaning: This is said when you decide that you will no longer be friends with someone.

20. Me ye ma'ye nanso na aka akyi.

'I will do it, I will do it,' but later it is too late to do it.

Meaning: Procrastination is the thief of time.

21. Onipa didi wie, na onkasa nwie.

Man may be able to finish eating, but he will not be able to finish talking.

Meaning: If someone talks a lot, and another person asks them to be quiet, they may say this proverb.

22. Tikoroo nko agyina.

One head cannot decide important matters.

Meaning: Two heads are better than one.

23. Baakofoo na ekum osono ma amanfoo adie.

One person may kill an elephant, but the whole community may share it.

Meaning: The good fortune of one person is good fortune for those around them.

24. Hwimhwim adee ko srosoro.

Something you take that does not belong to you goes quickly.

Meaning: Something once stolen is often stolen many time

25, Qpanin fere ne mma a, na ne mma suro no.

When an elderly person respects a child, the child respects the elderly person.

Meaning: This may be said if an employer is being disrespectful to his employees.

The following proverbs are from a textbook used in Junior Secondary Schools in Jamasi.

They were told to me by Albert Agyapong Nyantakyi.

1. Aberewa hwe okoko na akoko ahwe aberewa.

The old woman cares for the chicken, and the chicken cares for the old woman.

2. Obi do wo a, na oba wo fie.

It is when someone loves you that they come to your house.

3. Oba dueduefo nto ne na funu. Oba kyimakyima nto ne na fun.

The wandering child does not see the body of his dead mother before burial.

4. Obosom anim woko no mprensa.

The oracle is always consulted three times.

Meaning: Do not give up easily. This can also mean to cross check what you learn.

4. Ayonkogoro nti na okoto annya ti.

It was because of bad friends that the crab has no head. Meaning: This is derived from a story. The crab was very sociable and had many it friends. HE gave them all the things they asked of him. One day one of his friends said that he was going to see the chief and was worried that the chief would cut off his head. He asked crab to borrow his. Crab gave it to him, his friend had the false head chopped off. After awhile God felt bad that crab had no head, and gave him some eyes. The moral is that one cannot be so generous and unsuspecting of friends that they hurt themselves.

Conclusion

In discussing the preponderance of symbolism in Ghanaian culture, Herbert Cole and Doran Ross write, "The readiness of informants to verbally explain visual imagery indicates the close correspondence between the two in Akan thought, and therefore the extent to which people think in visual metaphors."²⁴ This is, I believe, one of the aspects of Akan culture which American culture has a lot to learn from. I see all this from the perspective of an American, and the with the bias this brings. It makes me compare this metaphorical way of thinking so important in Akan culture to the way that American culture focuses so heavily on speech and writing that other ways of thinking tend to get lost in just dealing with day to day life. Proverbs in Akan culture serve as a link between spoken, visual, and musical mediums, between literal and metaphoric thought. Rather than being compartmentalized, these are brought into a harmonious whole. Just as proverbs serve to help one think about an issue from a number of perspectives, Akan culture teaches that one should think about the world with the same quality found in it, infinite variety.

One of the things that impressed me most about proverbs is their seemingly limitless flexibility. Though proverbs derive their meaning from the context in which they are used, when ordered in various ways they are able to create their own context. Thus, when combined with a visual medium, images and proverbs have the ability to put each

Other in new kind of context. Traditionally, the visual images connected with proverbs are not placed next to them, side by side. Images serve, rather, as representatives. The comic strip "Ananse" was the only example I was able to find of proverbial metaphoric meaning combined with a visual medium which traditionally has its own way of being metaphoric. The combination of two unique methods of thought and expression opens up new possibilities. I was surprised at the lack of information I was able to find about the contemporary use of proverbs in non-traditional ways. Visual images combined with proverbs seem to mostly be literal illustration. In this context it is important to create combinations in which images are given their own voice, and both the proverbs and images are allowed to react to one another. It is a kind of syncretism. Perhaps the goal of this kind of syncretism is rooted in Western compartmentalization. Separate the images from the proverbs, and then see if it is possible to make them harmonious once more.

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¹⁴ Kwame Gyamfi, informal conversation, 16/4/99

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¹⁷ Yankah. Ibid. p.40

¹⁸ "Kwame Gyamfi, informal conversation, 16/4/99

¹⁹ Okwan. Ibid. p.6

²⁰ Mr. deGraft-Johnson, informal conversation, 24/4/99

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